1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

CHAPTER XI

Familism and Sex

162
834 THE small farmers' treatment of sex and the relations of men and women is no less characteristic of their communities than is their treatment of age differences. The country people are the ones among whom marriage is latest in Ireland, bachelorhood and spinsterhood most common, fecundity greatest. They are the ones among whom there is an excess of males over females, a fact which gives all Ireland a sex ratio (973 females to every 1,000 males) unexampled among the long-settled Old World countries and comparable only to those of the new countries. Yet the best evidence gives them a comparatively low illegitimacy rate, too, and the country people yield to no one in the strictness of their sexual morality.

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834 In the small farm households of the countryside, the roles, privileges, and duties of male and female are complementary. The division of labor between the sexes is only part of separation of human activity into male and female spheres. By oriental standards, perhaps, physical segregation of the sexes may be lacking. Yet in the countryside the community sets very rigid norms of conduct regulating the relations between men and women.

Indeed, the bounds of propriety among the small farmers are quite well marked. An outsider can come to see something of them almost at once. Men and women are much more often to be seen in the company of members of their

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ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

own sex than otherwise, except in the house itself. Except upon ceremonial occasions in family life or in the considerable affluence of owning a gig or a trap or a motorcar, in Clare at least they go to mass, to town, or to sportive gatherings with companions of their own sex. Till recently and even now in remote districts, a conventional peasant woman always kept several paces behind her man, even if they were walking somewhere together.

The women do not go out on *cuaird* like the men. Their sphere of interest and influence is better confined within the family circle. Women do not take part directly in the deliberations of such cliques as that described in the old men's house at Rynamona. On the other hand, they are not in the least excluded or treated lightly or in a derogatory fashion. At the old men's *cuaird* the woman of the house is nearly always present. Her being of the company does not seem to stem the flow of talk in the slightest. She remains silent or is ignored so long as their talk deals with the world of the men's interest. But when the talk swings around to her sphere, she is consulted and is ready to take an active part.

The girls, of course, the unmarried younger women and adolescents, keep to themselves and form cliques and smaller groups of neighbors and kinswomen among themselves. Occasionally a dance breaks the ordinary succession of work and evening talk in the kitchen. And then, in their more restricted place, they are ready to go about under the tutelage of parent or brother to meet the young men and boys of the community.

All this is nothing new and has been described before. Yet one must review it, because in it one can see the existence of statuses of the kind we have demonstrated before. Old woman, married young woman, and girl, each term is a status in the countryside, in the same manner as in the cases of the boys and men we have already presented. The

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ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

562 561 terms are summaries of status in farm economy, family life, and the cliques of the community.

834 208 Consequently the comment and attitude of the small farmers toward sexual behavior cannot be divorced from their appreciation of status in family and community. For them sexual behavior is merely one aspect, not of individual personality, but of sociological role. If one turns to any record of the sort of commentary and discussion the small farmers carry on among themselves, both in the semi-public discussion of the *cuaird* and in the more private talk of conversation among friends of a common age and status, one encounters a characteristic set of remarks and evaluations. These are for the most part discussions of specific persons in specific events. The attitudes expressed are directed now toward persons, now toward general conditions, now toward moral or ethical imperatives, now toward cosmological principle. Yet always, if sex is the subject, the status of the actors and the interests of the familist farm economy are the themes.

562 842 Women are valued and praised for their fecundity. All this is part of generally accepted convention among the small farmers, and such conversations as the following are not in the least unusual, despite the very great modesty and reticence of the farmers. A small farmer is praising an old woman, the head of the household, to one of the authors and contrasting her to her son's wife, both being listeners:

> Here is a woman that has no more milk of her own. They shouldn't allow a woman like that to breed because a man should always keep his wife in the milk. The old woman, God bless her, raised every child with the didi [breast].

369 831 The country-bred boy and girl grow up in an atmosphere of constant reference to sex and breeding. There seems to be little of the ignorance about such matters which the townsman delights so in attributing to country people. In Ireland, no less than elsewhere in the world, the antagonism between town and country often expresses itself in such

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

joking ascription of ignorance and stupidity. In Ireland, however, there is another side of the expression of town and country distrust. The countryside points to prostitution and immorality in the towns and finds something to back up its condemnations. The town returns its dislike with double measure and accuses the countryside of primitive lack of all sensitivity of feeling or restraint of impulse. But these antagonistic attitudes and ways of regarding other groups than one's own are not our concern here. They are of interest here because such ascriptions of ignorance are part of a common misapprehension of the complexity of the peasant attitudes.

For instance, to an outsider the countrymen will seem often to give a mere lip service to the attitudes of the townsman, for one is always apt to mistake the function of hearty laughter. The country people have strict moral and ethical attitudes around the question of sex, as rigid as those of any other class if not more so. Yet they have conventional licenses and conventional niceties which do not coincide with those of the other classes and are thus open to misunderstanding. And, like all classes and peoples, they have two sets of attitudes, not one, and these are "ambivalent," to adopt the Freudian term.

But these attitudes and their "ambivalent" nature, the kind of alternation they seem to present, must be understood in terms of the social relationships of the countryside. The greatest single cause of misapprehension lies here. In different contexts, toward different persons, in connection with different events, one and the same person regards the same subjects quite differently.

For example, in discussions of the peccadillos of young people and the censurable events of the district the farmers and their wives were full of animus against the "crabbit" great "bucks" of lads who led girls astray and from whom the innocent were not safe. Yet even then, in discussing the fault of such amorous lads and the necessity of circum-

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ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

369 834 208 522 spection and immediate and frequent confession for girls as their best defense, one sees that the pure young maidens are also not without blame. They bear the taint of Eve. "Sure the boys have no chance," said one woman in this respect, "for the girls always lay the blame on them." Yet these attitudes coexist together with other very hearty, casual, and sometimes ribald attitudes which make their appearance in banter, joke, and repartee even between speakers of different sex. These even take the form of taunts about prowess and mild ridicule for the possession of a greater relish than is meet, or fanciful recitation of past magnificent misdeeds. This is particularly true in the recitations of stories and adventures of persons in the ken of the community, where details of amorous desire and accomplishment are given with considerable gusto, and greeted and reiterated again and again amid hearty laughter.

369 834 208 [178] Certain observers profess to find the puritanical outlook on sexual matters on the increase in the countryside. The country people themselves purport to see a change in their own outlook. And it may be that the last generation has brought a considerable spread of Catholic moral standards with the spread of education and the opening of the countryside to urban influence.

In any event the laughter and hearty guffaws with which references of nearly any kind to sexual intercourse, sexual attraction, and childbearing are greeted, and the evident interest they evoke, are very much part of the everyday behavior of the small farmers. They do not imply in any sense an approval or acceptance of the deeds described. They are rather expressions of a very definite judgment. They are in the nature of a condemnation in which laughter is itself a sanction upon the forbidden.[1]

[1] The authors accept readily the view of laughter as a response to a situation where socially conditioned values are threatened with upset and yet not so deeply or irrevocably broken as to bring out a full reproval. The view is well developed by Pilkington and agrees with that of Max Eastman. The tabloid reader is not

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

The "earthiness" and the ribaldry of the country people is not an antithesis to their strict moral code. Rather it reinforces it. It gives its pietistic and too-respectable, churchly and town-bourgeois aspects an authentic, indigenous touch. Even more important, it makes for a modification of the conventional attitudes which fit them for the country people's social life.

In this ambivalence of attitude one can see the identifications between status in human relations and norms about sexual behavior more clearly. The one view, that "holiness" denies sex, can be reserved to suit the non-procreant statuses of family life. The other, the hearty and open view embodying animal analogy, frank interest, overt desire, can be reserved for the persons whose roles in social life allow free rein to the amatory and procreative urges.

For the small farmers marriages are for the purpose of producing children and assuring continuity of descent and ownership. They are "forever." They are indissoluble. Sexual relations are part of marriage, its pleasure and its duty. They lead to children if one is fortunate and strong and potent. It is the will of God. One may regret that one's childbearing came so early. There might have been more time for free enjoyment. But it is a regret to which one resigns oneself easily.

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weakening his horror of murder or his distaste for adulterous behavior, however familiar his tabloid-viewing may make them. Similarly the Englishman reading his detective stories and the Frenchman listening to his *chanteuses* are merely indulging vicarious "thrills." All of them are going through a playful rehearsal of the conditioned reflexes of social sanction, indignation, rage, and punitive action in the same way a dog growls and bares his fangs at his play fighting. The idea may seem a bit ludicrous in itself, and it will offend the moralists. But let them remember that in most persons moral and ethical activity is absolutely unreasoned, spontaneous, and without any kind of intellectual support at all. It is pure reflex. Like any other reflex, it must be kept alive by a constant restimulation. Only overzealous priests, reformers, teachers, "nice people," and prudes miss this point. They fail to understand that vulgarity often hides far stricter morality than hypocritic cant. This laughter represents a constant and not unpleasurable reiteration of the accepted canons of morality upon so important a matter.

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

581 833 842 Thus marital and sexual success have but one criterion. One proves one's worth sexually in the marriage bed, which is in turn the childbirth bed. The proof of happy adjustment, of masculine virility, and of feminine worth is "the good long family." "Lots of women have no children," you are told, "but the men have no value in them if they don't." Both man and woman are at fault and in misfortune in childlessness. In one case of repeated miscarriages, the man might be at fault, it was said, because "he usedn't to make them [the children] right."

834 It is only with the married men and women who are still engaged in producing offspring that any kind of sexual interest, officially at least, is permitted or even deemed to exist. Among others in the rural communities the interest either does not exist at all, in the eyes of small farmers, or it exists only as an evil, but powerful force. As such it must be subjected to constant control. This is the case among the young. Among the old, if it exists at all, it is only as a survival of embers that should far better be long dead. For adults, in adult family life, sex is divested of any awesome, evil character. "God help us," said one woman in this regard, "what is natural can't be wonderful."

581 Thus one can see why it is that nearly everything the young people do seems to their elders to shape them for the goal of marriage and family headship. Much of local custom comes to have that explanation. The goal is taken for granted. It is the ambition of all the young members. Their activity either marks time until they shall be able to take their places as married family heads or it prepares them for that directly. Even the pastimes and jollities of country life in the communities the authors came to know had that keynote.

The pastimes of the young people in which the usual segregation of the sexes is bridged point toward matchmaking and country marriage.

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

Even in cases of illegitimacy, if the mother comes to marry another man than her child's father, a match may sometimes save the day. It serves the social purposes and repairs the damage, though it removes none of the stain upon one's local reputation. In spite of the strictness of country standards, many small farmers have married "poor, unfortunate girls" of this kind, without irreparable loss of respectability. Yet even then the attitude of the community fits the familistic norm. Such cases are felt to be very unusual and special departures from custom. They are matters for some surprise and congratulation.

The moral standards of the countryside involve a most strict control of the young people in sexual matters. Premarital virginity is the ideal. It is a double standard, of course. The young lads are not, or were not until recently, expected to be so pure as the girls.

The sexual urges of the older people are deemed adequately satisfied in marriage. Adultery very seldom seems to come into the reckoning of the small farmers. This is part of the equation of sexual appetite and familistic aspirations. The country people know something of town prostitutes and have heard of occasional marital lapses in the countryside as well. But these matters are not of great interest. The incidents, as far as one can judge, are of infrequent occurrence. Marital fidelity is not only the ideal; it seems to be the fact as well. It seems even to be taken for granted, and any other course felt inconceivable.

Thus we must look to the relations among the unmarried young couples to see the chief point of pressure in the rural system of values. That is the area in which there is nearly all the smoke and not a little fire.

Although premarital virginity and complete abstinence from any kind of sexual activity is the ideal for the young, local custom emphasizes marriage all the while. Local dances and other festivities are the chief times of meeting

834 571 and play for the young men and women of the rural communities. The customs and conventions which surround them are constant reminders of marriage and its hopes and privileges.

834 571 626 Yet as soon as any intimacy of acquaintanceship builds up between a particular pair, they are matched together in local gossip. They are forced to take a position which is only a single step from betrothal. But, as elsewhere, lovers separate to find others. Though a once or twice fickle or jilted girl is subjected to constant gossip, her luck seems not to doom her entirely if she is attractive or a good match.

834 571 626 535 Such outings as the "patterns," [2] relics of saints' festivals, and race meetings in summer, and the dances in winter, are occasions of courtship, excitement, and philandering of sorts in the countryside. They are objects of censure on the part of those of the clergy, townsmen, and people of higher class who unite in condemning more obvious manifestations of peasant social life with little insight into a custom's function. The clergy, in particular, fulminate constantly against all-night dances. They object not so much to the jollities as to the opportunities for "walking out" among the young couples.

834 535 571 The following quotations from country people describe the situation. In the first a countryman is talking about "crabbit lads" who are to blame for local sexual irregularities, and comes around at last to the local dances:

> They are awfully crabbit around here. If a girl has money or land and she will get it, the boys try any way at all to put her up the hill so they will marry her and get it. And the parents keep the girl away from the boys for fear it will happen. But it is no good to keep the girl in the house, because, if you do, she knows nothing. Let her knock away and she soon learns how to take care of herself. If you don't, there are ways the crabbit lads will get to her.

[2] The local name of country festivals once religious, somewhat like the *pardons* of Brittany.

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

That was the way with the girl who married Willie Meaney[3] and he thought to get the money, but the parents said let her go. Now they are in Ennis and she never got anything. The same way with the two who married the Shaughnessy girls. They thought they would get something but they didn't get a thing. Would you believe that? America is not the only place where things like that happen. The people have crosses to bear. Every year we have a talk from the priest about the dances. He says the dances are all right but it is the going home that is bad. There is always a laugh when he says that. Then some of the parents get worried and they won't let their daughters go to a dance for a month or so, and they forget about it after that.

The status of boy and girl involves a "repression" of sexual impulse, virginity, and chastity of thought and expression, but custom and the attitudes of the older people provide a constant stimulation of sexual interest in the direction of the familistic system. The status of boy and girl thus involves a definite kind of sexual organization, based directly upon social relationships.

Nowhere is this better to be seen than in the case of the young woman's "character." Here the Church fathers and the country people seem to have attained quite a unanimity. Sexual orientation is inseparable from social role. Sexual repute and status are identical. The authors do not say this identification is unique. They do not know its historical origins. But they do wish to point out its function in this setting: The young woman's "character" is her full status as a social being because the familistic system is such that sexual activity, no less than economic, is completely integrated with one's role in social life. Consequently her sexual conduct is no concern of hers alone.

In the relationships in family and community in which the young girls of the countryside find their roles, any departure from the norm of conduct on their part is cause for

[3] Names of persons and smaller places in this and subsequent quotations are, of course, fictitious and refer to no actual persons or places of such names.

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

834 183 554 violent disturbance in the relations uniting others to themselves and to one another. To "destroy a girl's character" in the countryside is to upset the pattern of family and community life by overthrowing the possibility of an orderly change in farm succession. Much more than a shooting or a fight, a sexual irregularity, which cannot be righted in a match, is capable of destroying the intricate mutual obligations and expectancies of rural familism.

For the family whose "name" is "destroyed" and whose hopes of orderly re-formation are upset, two courses are open. One is to patch up a compromise, to accept the match [626] forced upon them. The other is to expel the offenders bodily. Community feeling gives full support. In either case the girl concerned can no longer hope for full status. If the match is made or another husband found to father a child, time may right matters and give her full adult status as a farm wife and mother. Her failure as a girl may be forgotten, but it was a failure still. Otherwise there is little further to do but suffer expulsion. Emigration has been the refuge till recently.

836 848 626 The country people's attitudes toward illegitimacy and premarital intercourse, one and the same to them, reflect well the disturbances they occasion. In discussing a local case, one woman could voice the community's opinion in the following general terms:

> A young lady with a good fortune even, she couldn't get any man because her character is broken. Unless maybe he is very low. And so she usually goes to America and passes for a maiden. Everyone knows the father of the child but, if he has a good farm of land, no one would say anything, but he would be unlucky and have no family. He would get another woman [a wife, that is] with no bother. The baby might be sent to a home. And after a time they bring it home as a cousin.

836 626 But it is not always that the boys are treated so leniently, and they, too, must emigrate, driven off by public censure.

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

836 the case of the followers of rural occupations other than the
558 ownership of land.

Even among the country people improper behavior has the effect of declassing the offender. Just as the farmers attribute sexual laxity to the classes of the population they consider below themselves, such as fishermen, tinkers, and itinerant laborers, and the laborers of the town, so, by a reversal of the view, destruction of status over sexual misdemeanor condemns one to membership in such categories.

This declassing effect of sexual misconduct is, of course, strongest for young women. Apart from the moral censure misconduct brings upon a young woman and the shame it inflicts upon the people of her "name," it brings as well the destruction of her social role. It makes an end of her potentialities, for these, too, are her "character": potential motherhood of a familist line on the one hand, and potential transmission of an advantageous alliance on the other. In a familistic order they are identical. They are both based upon her sex. They make of the unmarried girl a sort of symbol of familistic aspiration. To use the symbol for any but its proper purpose of procreation and alliance is to destroy not only its efficacy but the aspirations that are attached to it. Rural Ireland, indeed, provides a sort of archetype or "pure" form of this sexual outlook, the conventional western European ideal of premarital virginity. It is important here as a living function of a closely integrated social system.

834 When we turn to the rural attitude toward sexuality in the old people, all those who have relinquished farm command in favor of a younger procreant couple, the norms of the small farmers present the reverse of the coin. Both rural expressions and rural standards of conduct seem to reflect the attitude that only the married have a sex life or, if others have it, they should not.

The first facet of this attitude shows itself in many kinds

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

of situations. For instance, we have already seen that a woman whose son has married and who fails to get along well with the "new woman" may, quite without censure, move into the house of a daughter and share that house with the daughter's husband's father. Several cases came to notice in which women who had relinquished their farms moved in with the dead husband's brothers.

A famous joke between a well-loved old priest and his bishop in Clare based on a real incident plays around this last theme. On the occasion of his usual pastoral visit, the bishop congratulated the parish priest on the high moral standard of his parish. He had one reservation to make, however. He was shocked to learn that a couple who had recently moved into the priest's parish were living together openly and were not married. The parish priest caught the twinkle in his bishop's eye, but nevertheless he promised to make an inquiry and take necessary action. Next day he reported that he had learned that the couple were an old man and old woman, brother's wife and sister's husband, who had recently moved into a cottage together. They were both seventy, and had been living in the bishop's own parish for the last ten years. Since the bishop had been so shocked by their taking the house together, the priest said he would send them back and let his lordship deal with the problem as he had been doing before.

In such cases, obviously, the difference of sex of the house-mates as a danger to morality has disappeared. This agrees with the equation many country people seem to make between the "saintliness" of the old and their emancipation from the flesh.

By the same token, the old person who has already had his or her day of childgetting and childbearing, and yet still persists in manifesting sexual aspirations, is a stock figure of fun. He or she is the butt of endless ridicule and practical joking in the countryside. Again, of course, such

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

834 522 587 laughter is best explained as playful censure. For very real censure often breaks out against such a person. It is particularly likely to break out into overt punitive action in cases where old farmers threaten the expectations of their heirs by taking young women as second wives. In fact, the one kind of man or woman of considerable age who does not command respect is this. The countryside finds endless amusement in the theme of May and November. Naturally the matchmaking system does lend itself fairly well to matings between oldish men and young women, since ownership of a farm is the basis for a match.

581 554 183 The most interesting point of inquiry, then, may well be the connection between the sexual status of the family members, as we have described it here, and the standing of the family. The sexual status of the members is a reflection of their capacity for carrying alliance among the other families of the countryside. Can we draw, therefore, a connection between rural familistic norms about sexual behavior and the class structure of the rural community?

We know already that marriage in rural Ireland yields us one clue to the connection. At matchmaking the negotiations between the contracting parties concern the relative standing of each. That standing is at stake. The equivalence of dowry and land are arrived at through a careful enumeration of all the past history and the present material substance of the contracting families. The location of the farm, its livestock, its soil, the reputation and ancestry of the family, all these are compared. Backward places, we remember, do not grow big fortunes. Neither do many other kinds of persons and places.

We are dealing here of course only with one broad class, the country people. Yet within the boundaries of rural life there is much to be learned of the country people's treatment of relative prestige and standing among themselves. There are many behaviors in the activity of the countryside

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

241 231 A cruel custom is said to have been common in the district at one time, which was still in use in 1835, of harrowing with the harrow fastened to the horses tail.

513 The females of a family sleep in the "room," the men in the bed in the kitchen; if the family be large, the beds will be very full, the occupants lying "heads and points," as several of my informants phrased it, that is, some with their heads in the ordinary place, others with theirs to the foot of the bed. No night-clothing is worn by either sex among the poorer people.

A method of sleeping when the house was much crowded was formerly practised in this district, which is fully described by a writer[1] who has been frequently quoted in this Report:—"This is what is called sleeping in *stradoge*, and *is regulated* as follows:—The floor is thickly strewed with fresh rushes, and stripping themselves entirely, the whole family lie down at once and together, covering themselves with blankets if they have them, if not, with their day-clothing, but they lie down *decently*, and in order; the eldest daughter next the wall farthest from the door, then all the sisters according to their ages; next the mother, father, and sons in succession, and then the [834] strangers, whether the travelling pedlar, or tailor, or beggar; thus the strangers are kept aloof from the female part of the family, and if there be apparent community, there is great propriety of conduct."

262 3. *Food.*—The dietary varies somewhat with the locality, but fish seems to form a considerable part of it in all but the mountainous portions of the district. Flesh or fowl are rarely tasted, except at Christmas time, or at Michaelmas, or some other great occasion. The islanders are said to make some use of sea birds, but use fish as the staple animal food. This is eaten fresh in summer, and coarsely salted for winter use.

The main articles of diet are stirabout, soda-bread, and boxty (a form of damper made of grated raw potatoes, and cooked on a griddle. This extremely indigestible form of bread is much used in the mountainous parts), potatoes, and tea, which is becoming more [272] extensively used than formerly, and is now taken at nearly every meal. Whatever the other meals may be composed of, fish forms part of supper.

An average day's dietary in the Mullet would be somewhat as follows:—

262 264 *Breakfast.*—Potatoes and fish, or Indian meal (sometimes oatmeal) stirabout, buttermilk.

[1] C. O., "Sketches in Erris and Tyrawley," p. 34.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

green sweaters, men shamrocks in their buttonholes, and girls green hair ribbons, and there is much visiting in the afternoon following a special meal. Women spend the last weeks of Lent preparing new clothes for their spouses, their children, and themselves, which first are worn to mass on Easter. Eggs are accumulated before the feast day so that each member of the family will have several to eat at breakfast before mass, and in some homes the children gather and hide eggs the week before Easter to see who can collect the most by Sunday morning.

June 14th in Inis Beag is "pattern day," derived from the word patron, which honors the patron saint. Until the 1920s, when suppressed by the clergy, this day and the two days following it rivaled the 12 days of Christmas in festivity. Then it was customary for people from nearby islands and the mainland to visit Inis Beag, and the local folk in turn to attend pattern days in islands and communities in their vicinity. The celebration commenced with the digging out of sand from the church of the patron saint and from his tomb, or "bed," so that during the night of vigil islanders and visitors could pray while walking around the grave and rest in the church to gain special favor from the saint and from God. The day itself saw masses celebrated in the chapel, and athletic, dancing, and other competitions staged on the strand and contiguous common land. Tents were erected to accommodate vendors of food and drink, as well as solo and figure dancers who performed to the tunes played by visiting musicians of note. Most visitors departed at the end of the day, but those who remained were invited to take part in two more days of revelry in certain island homes, where dancing, singing, and drinking prevailed day and night. It was the prevalence of factional fighting and promiscuous behavior engendered by drunkenness which prompted the church to restrict the traditional practices of pattern day.

In the 1930s, the priest inaugurated a custom of celebrating mass on pattern day in the church of the patron saint; but it persisted for only two decades, and today the bed is cleared of sand but the church is not. My wife and I observed only 11 persons praying and resting during the night of vigil in 1960. Miraculous cures, appropriately embodied in legends and anecdotes, are claimed for persons who have propitiated the patron saint in this manner in the past, and most of those who still observe the vigil are seeking relief for physical ills. The most recent cures reported are for spinal meningitis, rheumatism, a deformed knee, and an eyeball pierced with a thorn. No work is done on pattern day now, and a dance in the evening, seldom attended by visitors other than tourists, is the only vestige of the gayety which once marked the day. This dance, just as the St. Patrick's Day dance, did not take place in 1960, even though an accordionist and two other mainlanders came out by *curach* to attend it; the shyness of local girls rather than the tide was the disruptive factor on this occasion.

All Saints is a holyday of obligation November 1st, and is followed next day by another feast—All Souls. One of the most popular of humorous anecdotes deals with All Saints' Day in a neighboring island, where once long ago the Church of Ireland pastor gave the day off to men working for him; when ten days later they asked to be off once again for St. Martin's Day, he inquired with seeming pique, "And where was Martin on All Saints' Day?" The feast of All Souls is also a workless day in Inis Beag, although the cemetery is given its one cleaning of the

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

775
772 parts fashioned by human hands. A valley in Inis Thiar is believed to have been created by such a ship passing over the island, "with a great roar and blowing of
[173] wind." According to Celtic tradition, souls not only transmigrated to the Land of
[825] Youth but became reincarnated on earth or embodied in animals through metempsychosis. The belief in reincarnation appears not to have persisted in Inis Beag, but seals sometimes are thought to be repositories of souls; those creatures so possessed look and act human and attach themselves to fishermen who have aided or harmed them, and whose *curach* they will pursue relentlessly. I was told by an old man of a seal that he had cursed at sea for fouling his net, which later followed in his wake for many miles glaring with rage, and finally pursued him 30 feet onto the strand as he and his frightened mates carried the canoe hurriedly to its cot.

Religion and Personality

157
771 It is appropriate here to assess the basic personality structure of Inis Beag islanders, since traits such as sexual puritanism, hypochondria, depression, masochism, conformism, and ambivalence toward authority are linked causally with religion in a very direct manner. Other personality characteristics, already or yet to be considered, which are more peripheral to religion include secretiveness, envy and jealousy, dogmatism, indolence, feelings of inferiority, and verbal skill.

157
831 Probably the most prominent trait of Inis Beag (and Irish) personality is sexual puritanism. Its etiology is complex and much debated, but appears to emb[illegible]ost significantly historical (such as the influence of ascetic monasticism and [illegible]sm), sociocultural (such as the Oedipus complex and male solidarity), and ps[illegible]ological (such as masochism) variables. How long it has been a major component of Irish national character is conjectural, for it is impossible to appraise with accuracy Irish society, culture, and personality prior to the nineteenth century.
[174] Sexual attitudes and behavior in Celtic, medieval, and early modern times can be surmised only from tangential and questionable sources; depending on which sources are quoted, as good a case can be made for sexual puritanism as its opposite before 1800.

167
831 The inculcation of sexual puritanism in Inis Beag must be examined in
864 three contexts: informal social controls of the curate and those imposed by the islanders on themselves, the influence of visiting "missions," and enculturation in
626 the home. The first of these has been taken up at length in the last chapter. Suffice
793 it to say here, some folk (especially certain youths who consider themselves
• 834 "worldly") resent the intrusions of priests and neighbors into their sexual lives. They ask what right have young, virginal, inexperienced, and sexually unknowledgeable curates to give advice and pass judgments in this sphere. Equally resented are those persons who hide themselves in the darkness or behind fences to overhear the conversations of passersby, which may pertain to sexual matters, and those who maintain close scrutiny of visitors during the summer, both day and
831 night, in order to discover them in "compromising" situations. Sexual rumors run
203 rife in the island, such as those concerning the "nude" sunbathing of mainland
[609] girls (bared shoulders and lower thighs) and the "attacks" on them at night by

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

574 273 Women [562] [514] tend to drink very little at parties, in part because of the embarrassment caused them by visiting the outside toilet with men looking on.

574 571 [535] [562] [857] The party commences with several sets danced in quick succession. There is room for only one dance group initially because of the small size of the kitchen and the large number of guests filling the house. It is difficult to move about the two rooms with the press of bodies, and the crowd within is matched by the cluster of men around the front door awaiting their turn to dance. Unmarried women tend to sit and stand on one side of the kitchen and men on the other, while married people congregate in the other room. Children in their best dress sit quietly together and watch the festivities tirelessly until the guests depart.

574 834 Crowding at the party necessitates that men and women will be pressed together both as dancers and viewers, and that persons will sit on one another's laps, including women on the laps of men occasionally. The islanders strain to display indifference, as they do in watching a full-bodied woman step dance, at least until the intake of alcohol causes a few to betray their emotions.

574 533 [123] 574 273 [533] [535] Usually two or even three accordionists (and the visiting anthropologist with his phonograph) are invited to attend, and they spell one another. After an hour or so of dancing, singers and step dancers perform between the sets while stout is poured; they may be called out by the urging of the guests, or by the host or one of his choosing who acts as a master of ceremonies and directs all of the activities of the party. Stout may be distributed during the sets, but most hosts prefer that it be done during pauses, so that less is spilled by the dancing and milling crowd. The pourer with his bucket follows the movement of the mugs and glasses as they are passed about, and each man on having his container filled drains it quickly and surrenders it to another nearby. Most of the young men visit the pubs before the party and may do so again once or twice before the pubs close.

574 264 [576] Midway during the night, the table of "the room" is set, and refreshments are served to all of the guests in shifts. First the women are served, then the children, followed by the young men who do not drink stout, and finally the other men. Both in viewing the proceedings from benches and in eating, the children are separated as to sex. The menu resembles that of the usual Inis Beag meal and includes tea, bread spread with butter and jam, cakes, and sometimes hard candy.

[351] 574 535 Between the many sittings, the dishes and utensils are washed in a bucket and the table reset. Dancing continues in the kitchen during this period, and after everyone is served the table is moved to a corner and a second set is formed. The remainder of the night is spent in dancing, but the pauses which punctuate the sets become longer and the songs and step dances by guests more frequent as dawn approaches.

574 579 123 [577] My wife and I sponsored a Christmas party in 1959 in the home of an islander and invited the entire population of Inis Beag. Two hours after midnight, when I was absent briefly escorting an old man to his cottage, a fight broke out between two family factions which sent all of the guests scurrying home. The following day, everyone whom we met commiserated with us "for the shame of it," and we were told of many other parties in the past which had ended in the same manner, so that we would not think our affair a failure. In recent years, "rowdyism" on the part of youths who have "taken too much" has increased at

574 579 178 [738]

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

The best singers will be called out with shouts of encouragement from the others, and some men need as many as five minutes of urging before they will perform. In the case of the man who is particularly reticent about singing, those sitting on either side of him will grasp his hands with one of theirs and swing his arms backward and forward until he commences to sing in the suggested rhythm of the arm movements. Sometimes this continues throughout the song, and later in the evening it is done with other singers as the sense of male "camaraderie" grows apace.

Seldom does fighting break out in the pub, for the publican will not serve drinks to those whom he feels have taken too much, and he will order everyone out if there is a threat of violence. Visiting women invariably are treated politely no matter how boisterous the men become. On a nearby island, my wife and I saw a Yank brutally beaten and thrown out of a pub by several men when he spoke "disrespectfully" in Gaelic before us and another visiting women. An elderly widower of Inis Beag was much criticized when after dancing with my wife in a pub he brushed his check against hers briefly in his exuberance; she thought nothing of it, but many of the folk apologized to her for his action, and our relationship with the man thereafter was strained. Visitors must be careful about how they participate in the drinking pattern of the pub. If they drink by themselves or only with outsiders and never buy rounds for the islanders present, they are despised secretly; but if they stand rounds often with the obvious end in view of earning acceptance, they are considered "fools." The several folk who will take advantage of a stranger who is generous with rounds in the pub are subjected to severe censure. Each year, my wife and I donate a barrel of stout to a pub on St. Partick's Day to be drunk by islanders who come that night—to commemorate the shipwreck and rescue (whose anniversary is nine days before); a verse of my ballad refers to certain folk who will not accept drinks unless they can reciprocate—"People will say the free stout brought me in."

17: Messenger E-4,5 (1958-1966)1971 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inis Beag

to "our man") be chosen for the task. Earlier, according to island opinion, the same priest had caused to be committed to the "madhouse" a local man who publicly challenged certain of his actions. The unfortunate man was released six months later, as per law, since he was not mentally ill.

Sexual misconceptions are myriad in Inis Beag. The islanders share with most Western peoples the belief that men by nature are far more libidinous than women. The latter have been taught by some curates and in the home that sexual relations with their husbands are a "duty" which must be "endured," for to refuse coitus is a mortal sin. A frequently encountered assertion affixes the guilt for male sexual strivings on the enormous intake of potatoes of the Inis Beag male. (In Nigeria, among the people whom my wife and I studied, women are thought to be more sexually disposed than men and are the repositories of sexual knowledge; it is they who initiate coitus and so pose a threat to their spouses. Nigerian men place the blame on clitoridectomy performed just prior to marriage.) Asked to compare the sexual proclivities of Inis Beag men and women, one mother of nine said, "Men can wait a long time before wanting 'it,' but we can wait a lot longer." There is much evidence to indicate that the female orgasm is unknown—or at least doubted, or considered a deviant response. One middle-aged bachelor, who considers himself wise in the ways of the outside world and has a reputation for making love to willing tourists, described one girl's violent bodily reactions to his fondling and asked for an explanation; when told the "facts of life" of what obviously was an orgasm, he admitted not realizing that women also could achieve a climax, although he was aware that some of them apparently enjoyed kissing and being handled.

Inis Beag men feel that sexual intercourse is debilitating, a common belief in primitive and folk societies. They will desist from sex the night before they are to perform a job which will require the expenditure of great energy. Women are not approached sexually during menstruation or for months after childbirth, since they are considered "dangerous" to the male at these times. Returned "Yanks" have been denounced from the pulpit for describing American sexual practices to island youths, and such "pornographic" magazines as *Time* and *Life*, mailed by kin from abroad, have aroused curates to spirited sermon and instruction.

The separation of the sexes, started within the family, is augmented by separation in almost all segments of adolescent and adult activity. Boys and girls are separated to some extent in classrooms, and completely in

JOHN C. MESSENGER

recess play and movement to and from school. During church services, there is a further separation of adult men and women, as well as boys and girls, and each of the four groups leaves the chapel in its turn. The pubs are frequented only by men or by women tourists and female teachers who have spent several years on the mainland while training and thus are "set apart" (and, of course, by inquisitive female ethnographers). Women occasionally visit the shops to procure groceries, but it is more common for them to send their children to do so, since supplies and drinks are proffered across the same counter, and men are usually to be found on the premises. Even on the strand during summer months, male tourists tend to bathe at one end and women at the other. Some swimmers "daringly" change into bathing suits there, under towels and dresses—a custom practiced elsewhere in Ireland which has overtones of sexual catharsis.

It is often asserted that the major "escape valve" of sexual frustration among single persons in Ireland is masturbation; frustration-aggression theorists, however, would stress the ubiquity of drinking, alcoholism, disputes, and pugnacity as alternative outlets. Pugnacity can also be linked to the widespread problem of male identity. Our study revealed that male masturbation in Inis Beag seems to be common, premarital coitus unknown, and marital copulation limited as to foreplay and the manner of consummation. My wife and I never witnessed courting—"walking out"—in the island. Elders proudly insist that it does not occur, but male youths admit to it in rumor. The claims of young men focus on "petting" with tourists and a few local girls, whom the "bolder" of them kiss and fondle outside of their clothing. Island girls, it is held by their "lovers," do not confess these sins because they fail to experience pleasure from the contact. The male perpetrators also shun the confessional because of their fear of the priest.

We were unable to determine the frequency of marital coitus. A considerable amount of evidence indicates that privacy in the act is stressed and that foreplay is limited to kissing and rough fondling of the lower body, especially the buttocks. Sexual activity invariably is initiated by the husband. Only the male superior position is employed; intercourse takes place with underclothes not removed; and orgasm, for the man, is achieved quickly, almost immediately after which he falls asleep. (I must stress the provisional nature of these data, for they are based on a limited sample of respondents and relate to that area of sexual behavior least freely discussed.)

Many kinds of behavior disassociated from sex in oth r societies,

17: Messenger E-4,5 (1958-1966)1971 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inis Beag

Many kinds of behavior disassociated from sex in other societies such as nudity and physiological evacuation, are considered sexual in Inis Beag. Nudity is abhorred by the islanders, and the consequences of this attitude are numerous and significant for health and survival. Only infants have their entire bodies sponged once a week, on Saturday night; children, adolescents, and adults, on the same night, wash only their faces, necks, lower arms, hands, lower legs, and feet. Several times my wife and I created intense embarrassment by entering a room in which a man had just finished his weekly ablutions and was barefooted; once when this occurred, the man hurriedly pulled on his stockings and said with obvious relief, "Sure, it's good to get your clothes on again." Clothing always is changed in private, sometimes within the secrecy of the bedcovers, and it is usual for the islanders to sleep in their underclothes.

Despite the fact that Inis Beag men spend much of their time at sea in their canoes, as far as we could determine none of them can swim. Four rationales are given for this deficiency: the men are confident that nothing will happen to them, because they are excellent seamen and weather forecasters; a man who cannot swim will be more careful; it is best to drown immediately when a canoe capsizes far out in the ocean rather than swim futilely for minutes or even hours, thus prolonging the agony; and, finally, "When death is on a man, he can't be saved." The truth of the matter is that they have never dared to bare their bodies in order to learn the skill. Some women claim to have "bathed" at the back of the island during the heat of summer, but this means wading in small pools with skirts held knee-high, in complete privacy. Even the nudity of household pets can arouse anxiety, particularly when they are sexually aroused during time of heat. In some homes, dogs are whipped for licking their genitals and soon learn to indulge in this practice outdoors. My wife, who can perform Irish step-dances and sing many of the popular folk songs, was once requested to sing a seldom-heard American Western ballad; she chose "The Lavendar Cowboy," who "had only two hairs on his chest." The audience response was perfunctory and, needless to say, she never again was "called out" to sing that particular song.

The drowning of seamen, who might have saved themselves had they been able to swim, is not the only result of the sexual symbolism of nudity; men who were unwilling to face the nurse when ill, because it might have meant baring their bodies to her, were beyond help when finally treated. While my wife and I were on the island, a nurse was assaulted by the mother of a young man for diagnosing his illness and

bathing his chest in the mother's absence. (In this case, Oedipal and sexual attitudes probably were at work in tandem.)

It must be pointed out that nudity is also shunned for "health" reasons, for another obtrusive Inis Beag character trait is hypochondria. In some cases, however, it is hard to determine whether concern with modesty or health is dominant in a particular behavioral response. Fear of colds and influenza is foremost among health concerns; rheumatism and related muscular joint ailments, migraine headaches and other psychosomatic disorders, tooth decay, indigestion ("nervous stomach"), and hypermetropia are other widespread pathologies which cause worry among the folk—not to mention those of supernatural origin.

Secrecy surrounds the acts of urination and defecation. The evacuation of infants before siblings and strangers is discouraged, and animals that discharge in the house are driven out. Chickens that habitually "dirty" their nests while setting are soon killed and eaten. Although some women drink spirits privately, they seldom do so at parties. In part this is because of the embarrassment involved in visiting the outside toilet with men in the "street" looking on. One of the most carefully guarded secrets of Inis Beag, unreported in the many works describing island culture, is the use of human manure mixed with sand as a fertilizer. We were on the island eight months before we discovered that compost is not "street drippings" and "scraw," but decomposed feces. With "turf" becoming more difficult to procure from the mainland, some islanders have taken to importing coal and processed peat and burning cattle dung. The dung is prepared for use in difficult-to-reach plots at the back of the island when tourists are few in number; it is burned covertly because of the overtones of sex and poverty. Another custom that my wife and I learned of late in our research, due to the secrecy surrounding it, concerns the thickening of wool; men are required to urinate in a container and tread the wool therein with their bare feet.

Other major manifestations of sexual repression in Inis Beag are the lack of a "dirty joke" tradition (at least as the term is understood by ethnologists and folklorists) and the style of dancing, which allows little bodily contact among participants. I have heard men use various verbal devices—innuendoes, puns, and asides—that they believed bore sexual connotations; relatively speaking, they were pallid. In the song that I composed, one line of a verse refers to an island bachelor arising late in the day after "dreaming perhaps of a beautiful mate"; this is

17: Messenger E-4,5 (1958-1966)1971 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inis Beag

regarded as a highly suggestive phrase, and I have seen it redden cheeks and lower glances in a pub. Both step- and set-dancing are practiced in Inis Beag, although the former type is dying out. This rigid-body dancing, from which sex is removed by shifting attention below the hips, appears to have originated in Ireland during the early nineteenth century. The set patterns keep partners separated most of the time; but, even so, some girls refuse to dance, because it involves touching a boy. Inis Beag men, while watching a woman step-dance, stare fixedly at her feet, and they take pains to appear indifferent when crowding at a party necessitates holding women on their laps and rubbing against them when moving from room to room. But they are extremely sensitive, nevertheless, to the entire body of the dancer and to these casual contacts, as are the women. Their covert emotional reactions (which become overt as much drink is taken) are a form of catharsis.

SEXUAL REPRESSION: ITS HISTORICAL CAUSES

Analysts of Irish character have put forth various hypotheses to account for sexual repression, ranging from the sophisticated to the absurd. The former can be classified under three rubrics: historical (e.g., the influence of ascetic monasticism, Augustinianism, and Jansenism), sociocultural (e.g., the Oedipus complex in the Irish family and male solidarity), and psychological (e.g., masochism). Beyond serious scientific consideration are such hypotheses as the loss of the Irish tongue, lack of a Catholic aristocracy, fear of Protestant libertinism, and the ever-appealed-to factors of race, climate, and the famine. In the following paragraphs, I will quote excerpts from Irish authors and from critical observers of the Irish scene, including social scientists, rather than dissect their views myself.

Paul Blanshard, in his polemical but insightful (and, in my estimation, often understated) work, *The Irish and Catholic Power*, says that "whatever the explanation, the total sexual expression of the Irish people is much less than it is in other countries, and that the Catholic crusade against normal sexual life has actually created a nation of men and women who try to drown their fundamental instincts." In attempting to account for sexual repression on such a scale, he writes:

their exhortations. The most common theme is "controlling one's passions," but two others have often been addressed in the missionizing effort: abstaining from intoxicating drink and maintaining the faith as an emigrant. Collections are made by children to support the endeavor, and a list of contributors and their respective donations is displayed publicly. This technique of social control is also used by the curate at the several yearly offerings. A mission creates an emotionally charged atmosphere on the island, which continues for weeks after the departure of the clerics.

The seeds of repression are planted early in childhood by parents and kin through instruction supplemented by rewards and punishments, conscious imitation, and unconscious internalization. Although mothers bestow considerable affection and attention on their offspring, especially on their sons, physical love as manifested in intimate handling and kissing is rare in Inis Beag. Even breast feeding is uncommon because of its sexual connotation, and verbal affection comes to replace contact affection by late infancy. Any form of direct or indirect sexual expression—such as masturbation, mutual exploration of bodies, use of either standard or slang words relating to sex, and open urination and defecation—is severely punished by word or deed. Care is taken to cover the bodies of infants in the presence of siblings and outsiders, and sex is never discussed before children. Several times my wife inadvertently inquired as to whether particular women were pregnant, using that word before youths, only to be "hushed" or to have the conversation postponed until the young people could be herded outside. The adults were so embarrassed by the term that they found it difficult to communicate with her after the children had departed. She once aroused stupefaction among men on the strand when she attempted unsuccessfully to identify the gender of a bullock about to be shipped off.

It is in the home that the separation of sexes, so characteristic of Inis Beag life, is inaugurated among siblings in early childhood. Boys and girls in the family remain apart not only when interacting with the parent of the same sex at work, but when playing in and near the cottage and traveling to and from school. Parents and their older offspring read popular religious journals, found in most homes, many of the articles in which deal with sexual morality of the Irish Catholic variety.

One sociologist (Berger 1963: 66–92) classifies social control methods as those which involve physical violence or its threat (e.g., political and legal sanctions), those which result in economic pressures (e.g., occupation and market place relations), and, finally, those which